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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 20 January 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. ABAKA
(Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Khan, Ms. Abaka, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report of Morocco (CEDAW/C/MOR/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) thanked the members of the Committee for their remarks and pertinent questions concerning the report and for their commendation of the progress achieved in Morocco. He recalled that his delegation had submitted to the Committee an addendum to its initial report at the time of its presentation.

3. His Government's policies on women's rights were based on the principles of the Shariah and demonstrated its determination to continue moving forward. In 1987, it had adopted a National Strategy for the Advancement of Moroccan Women to the Year 2000, drafted by an ad hoc commission composed of representatives of ministries, women's groups, the media, experts and researchers. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was responsible for preparing implementation reports based on data from the interested parties. The report of Morocco to the Fourth World Conference on Women had also been prepared by a national commission, and the various interested parties had adopted it by consensus. It described the various measures concerning women's legal, economic and social rights implemented since 1985, and recommended further measures for the advancement of women. On the basis of those recommendations and of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was preparing a draft national plan of action to be submitted to the national commission for approval. The draft detailed the Government's strategies for safe motherhood, employment, literacy and adult education, and improved education in rural areas.

4. The creation in November 1993 of the Ministry of Human Rights had been a concrete expression of the Government's policy for the protection and promotion of human rights. The Ministry was responsible for consultation with individuals and groups, investigating individual cases, promoting respect for human rights, ensuring the conformity of domestic law with international instruments ratified by Morocco and promoting a human rights culture in society as a whole. It was particularly attentive to the human rights of women.

5. The Ministry was involved, inter alia, in drafting legislative and regulatory texts, promoting urgent measures in favour of disadvantaged sectors of society, and following up government projects in those areas. Since its creation, it had invited women's groups to take part in permanent consultation and dialogue aimed at establishing a joint cooperation programme.

6. In December 1994, the Ministry of Human Rights had signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Education with a view to strengthening the teaching of human rights, including women's rights. In its relations with the Arab world, the Muslim world and the international community, Morocco had always advocated a policy of peace among peoples, religious and cultural tolerance and rejection of political violence, and it was the duty of its education system to promote those values. A joint commission composed of representatives of the two ministries had been set up to promote the incorporation into teaching materials of universally recognized human rights and in March 1996, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research had concluded an agreement with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the creation of a UNESCO Chair of Human Rights. Such measures in the educational field were designed to overcome prejudices based on the stereotyped roles of men and women. Another noteworthy initiative was the production by the Ministry of Human Rights, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), of a brochure containing the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a simplified and illustrated form designed to be read by children.

7. Treaties signed and ratified by Morocco took second place in the hierarchy of its legal standards, after the Constitution and before the law. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, like other Conventions, was an integral part of the law. The Ministry of Human Rights would ensure that the initial report was widely publicized in order to promote public awareness, particularly among women, of the provisions of the Convention.

8. As for article 2, the Government of Morocco was prepared to implement it provided that it was not in contradiction with the Shariah. In 1992, His Majesty Hassan II had taken steps to reform the Personal Status Code (Moudouana), resulting in the legislative Dahirs of 10 September 1993, which were intended to stabilize the family, combat the abuse of law and redress a number of previous injustices. Other reforms had followed, including the introduction of a new commercial code which no longer required a husband's authorization for engaging in commercial activity or for obtaining a passport. The Dahir of 12 November 1992 concerning social security enabled women workers to receive maternity benefits for 12 weeks instead of 10 during the period of maternity leave. A draft labour code was before the Parliament, and other drafts were in preparation in the field of criminal law.

9. Turning to article 5 of the Convention, it was true that legislative reform was not enough to change behaviour patterns. Since the law could not change people's attitudes, it was necessary to inform women of their new rights so that they could lay claim to them in courts of law. The Government was taking a gradual approach. To avoid creating a gulf between law and reality, legislators were endeavouring to adopt a consensus policy.

10. In reference to the issue of prostitution, the Criminal Code made it an offence to aid, assist or protect the prostitution of others, to share in the earnings of the prostitution of others or to act as an intermediary for the purposes of prostitution or debauchery. The Code provided for penalties of six months to two years' imprisonment and a fine, or two to five years' imprisonment and a fine if corruption of minors was involved. In 1973, Morocco had ratified

the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; in 1992, it had ratified the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances; and in 1993, it had ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

11. Morocco had expressed a reservation to article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention, concerning nationality. His delegation believed that the wording of that paragraph reflected the values prevalent at the time of its elaboration, when the need to prevent statelessness had been an important consideration. As for article 10, particularly measures to reduce disparities between the sexes in the field of education, the Ministry of Education had adopted a series of strategies in the 1990s aimed at adapting methods and programmes, improving enrolment rates and encouraging the education of girls. Current measures included a programme to support primary education in rural areas and an experimental project to encourage the enrolment of girls.

12. In order to relieve the negative social impact of structural adjustment, the Government had adopted a social development strategy for the 1990s, which had given rise to a programme of social priorities for 13 disadvantaged provinces; its first phase was provided for in the 1996-1997 budget. The programme consisted of three complementary and interdependent projects: basic education, basic health and national promotion. The basic education project was in two parts, namely primary education and literacy. The primary education aspect was designed to improve access to primary education in rural areas, particularly for girls, to contribute to development of school canteens, to improve conditions in pre-school Koranic classes in order to give greater access to that form of education, particularly for girls, and to improve working methods and electronic equipment in the departments concerned.

13. The national strategy for literacy and adult education was designed to adapt programmes to the real needs of the population by dealing with the problem gradually with integrated and complementary programmes. The aim was to reduce the illiteracy rate from the current figure of 55 per cent to 10 per cent by the year 2010, by training 680,000 persons per year. The literacy department of the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs had been upgraded to a Directorate in November 1996. The programme involved two closely linked activities: the "post-literacy" element, to enable rural inhabitants involved in the programme to put their new knowledge into practice, and the "literacy" element, which entailed a number of changes in current teaching methods in order to better adapt them to varying needs on a province-by-province basis.

14. Several members of the Committee had asked questions in connection with article 11 of the Convention. Article 8 of the draft labour code before Parliament prohibited all discrimination against an employee on the basis of race, colour, sex, marital status, religion, political views, national origin or social background in respect of his or her employment or profession. In 1983, the Supreme Court had struck down a rule requiring that air hostesses employed by Royal Air Moroc should be unmarried. The 1996 Constitution gave women the right to own property and to engage in business. Adult women had the legal right to manage their own property, to dispose of it, to inherit, and to enter into contracts. More and more women were joining the workforce, out of economic

necessity and as a result of the liberalization of the law in that area. There were increasing numbers of women in decision-making positions in both the private and public sectors, and the numbers of women in the judiciary, some of them occupying senior positions, were steadily increasing. As for article 12, one of the fundamental duties of all health-care professionals was to give equal treatment to patients without any form of discrimination. Respect for the dignity, integrity and consent of the human person was central to the Government's health policy. Consent and freedom of choice were indispensable for all forms of health care, including family planning and prevention of the spread of AIDS.

15. Since the early 1980s, the Government's health policy had been inspired by the universal goal of "Health for all". Priority had been given to developing basic health care, care for mothers and infants and family planning, as well as more recent programmes to combat deficiency diseases, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Health care was provided at two levels: local health centres in urban and rural areas, and a network of 104 hospitals.

16. The private sector was involved in family planning and safe motherhood programmes. Since its implementation, the family planning programme had achieved considerable results. Use of contraceptive methods by married women had reached 50 per cent in 1995, compared with 42 per cent in 1992 and 19 per cent in 1980. There was, however, a considerable discrepancy in that respect between urban and rural communities. The national family planning programme was financed partly by the State and partly by assistance from international organizations. Women were free to choose a method of contraception, and the husband's consent was not required except for sterilization. The most widely used method was the contraceptive pill.

17. Statistics for mortality, morbidity, life expectancy at birth and fertility had all shown considerable improvements. However, in the area of safe motherhood, the results achieved had not lived up to expectations: the maternal mortality rate was still high, at 332 per 100,000 live births. The main causes included haemorrhages, infections, toxaemia and high blood pressure. Problems currently facing the health system included the under-use of rural maternity centres, insufficient means of emergency evacuation, lack of public information, and budgetary constraints. The incidence of anaemia among women of child-bearing years was 30 per cent, and among pregnant women, 45 per cent. All women had free access to health care, including measures to prevent the spread of AIDS. Public information and awareness campaigns concerning AIDS had been organized, particularly for women prisoners. Three hundred and thirty-five cases of AIDS had been reported in Morocco in 1996. Reported cases among women had increased from 13 in 1987-1991 to 95 in 1992-1996.

18. It was hoped to bring about a reduction of 25 per cent in maternal mortality and morbidity rates by the year 2001, by promoting prenatal examinations, attended deliveries, and post-natal examinations. Other measures included promoting the use of modern contraceptive methods, particularly long-term methods such as intrauterine devices, and encouraging the participation of the private sector in supplying contraceptives.

19. The Government intended to take further measures to promote social mobilization in favour of safe motherhood, family planning and women's health issues, strengthening its information, education and communication strategy, improving access to health care through measures that included the creation of an obligatory health insurance system. A national congress on the theme "Women and health", organized in December 1996 and involving non-governmental organizations, political parties, trade unionists and others, had endeavoured to increase awareness in civil society of women's health issues and to promote community participation with a view to improving health statistics by the year 2001.

20. In reply to a question from a Committee member, he said that abortion was clearly one of the major threats to the health and life of mothers and to the future fertility of the women concerned. That was why Moroccan law prohibited pregnancies outside marriage and mobilized all its energies to prevent women having recourse to abortion; the latter was prohibited by articles 449-458 of the Criminal Code, although under article 453, abortion was not punishable when it was necessary to save the mother's life.

21. Morocco had declared that it could not be bound by article 15 of the Convention, particularly the provisions relating to the choice by women of their residence and domicile. Under article 34 of the Moudouana, one of the rights and duties of spouses was to live together. However, the Supreme Court had decided in February 1972 that, if the husband had a contagious disease, the wife could be authorized to live away from the marital home.

22. Morocco's reservations with respect to article 16 of the Convention were based on the Shariah, particularly the provisions concerning equality between men and women during marriage and upon its dissolution. As far as the marriage of an insane person was concerned, equality between the sexes was enshrined in article 7 of the Moudouana, under which the judge could authorize the marriage of an insane or mentally retarded person on the basis of a report of a council of psychiatrists stating that marriage could be salutary for that person, provided that the other party was informed of the illness and agreed to the marriage. The two adouls (notaries) could draw up the marriage certificate only after presentation of a copy of the marriage permit issued by the judge. Article 12, paragraph 4 of the Moudouana specifically protected family cohesion, the moral integrity of marriage and women from pressure from their guardians.

23. In the case of polygamy, he pointed out that while the husband remained the head of the family, the wife was still entitled to keep her own property, to a dowry, to alimony and to have priority custody of the children.

24. With respect to domestic violence, women could file for divorce under article 56 of the Moudouana, if they have proper proof of the charges, notably a medical certificate. Divorces were granted by judges only after all attempts at reconciliation had failed. Currently, there were no statistics available on the extent of violence against women.

25. As far as repudiation was concerned, since 1993 Morocco had decided to award a compensation to the wife in the event of arbitrary unilateral repudiation by the husband. Conversely, if the wife wished to dissolve the

marriage, she had to pay compensation to her husband. In the event of unilateral repudiation by the husband, the marriage was not dissolved, but suspended. The judge established the period of legal withdrawal of the wife at three months; the idda (period of continence) was designed to verify whether or not the woman was pregnant.

26. The CHAIRPERSON, noting that the representative of Morocco had not provided answers to all the Committee's questions, expressed the hope that the answers would be provided in the next report.

27. Ms. SHALEV asked for the detailed information provided in the oral presentation to be provided in writing. The recommendations of the November 1996 national congress on women's health should be included in Morocco's subsequent report. Noting that the percentage of trained personnel attending births was 40 per cent, she urged the Government to focus on raising that percentage, especially in the rural areas, in order to decrease the rate of maternal mortality. The Government should also concentrate on providing emergency services for childbirth in rural areas.

28. She noted that safe abortion was not a threat to women's health or fertility; it was unsafe, illegal abortions which endangered women's life, health and fertility. She therefore urged the Government to consider the implications of such unsafe abortions, owing to their illegality and their impact on maternal mortality rates.

29. Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL said that there was a contradiction between the Government's efforts to improve the situation of women and the religious law, which kept women in a subordinate position, particularly within the family. Other Muslim countries had made further progress than Morocco in the area of gender equality. Religion should never be used as a pretext for not implementing the provisions of the Convention. That position had also been forcefully stated at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Unless women achieved equality within the family, it was impossible for them to achieve equality in the workplace, education and health.

30. In that regard, she recommended that the Government of Morocco should use the Convention in the context of human rights education, because the Convention, the work of the Committee and its general recommendations were very useful tools. As Morocco had done with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it should publish and disseminate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in such a way that people from all walks of life with varying levels of education could easily understand it. The Government should do its utmost to ensure that Moroccan men and women were conversant with the Convention and the Committee's work, and its conclusions with respect to the Moroccan report itself.

31. The next report should be prepared in accordance with the guidelines. It should also take into account the general recommendations, in particular the one on disabled women (General Recommendation No. 18). The next report should provide information on what action Morocco was taking to ensure that disabled girls and women could have access to education, training and employment. The Government of Morocco should also establish specific measures to protect young

women emigrating to other countries to prevent them from falling victim to trafficking.

32. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING drew attention to the fact that the Government of Morocco's second report was due in 1998. Noting that the Committee's concluding comments were the results of the constructive dialogue between the Committee and the Government, in that they contained both praise and concerns, she wondered to what extent the Government intended to distribute those concluding comments.

33. Ms. TALLAWY, noting the encouraging progress made in the Moroccan judiciary with the appointment of women judges, expressed the hope that other countries in the region, including her own, could draw on that experience. However, she wondered why similar progress had not been made by women in the area of diplomacy and, specifically, why there were no women ambassadors. Since the reservation on nationality had seemed to be related to some past experience of the country, she wondered whether the Government was thinking about withdrawing that reservation.

34. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that while the Committee now understood better the spirit of the ongoing reforms in Morocco based on the Shariah, it still did not understand why discrimination persisted. In that regard, she agreed with previous speakers that religion should not be an obstruction to the advancement of women. She had been very pleased to learn about the concrete steps that Morocco was taking to move forward gradually on the basis of national consensus. She asked how women could participate in such consensus, since the majority of them remained illiterate. She wondered whether they were aware of their rights, and whether a qualitative survey had been carried out with respect to women's views on polygamy, repudiation and the fact that crucial decisions on matters affecting them were taken on their behalf without consulting them. While it was up to every society to preserve its customs and positive traditional values, she was not sure that women were participating as appropriately or as fully as they should in that consensus. In that regard, she wished to recommend that the Government of Morocco should do its utmost to better inform women about their rights. Only then could consensus have any true value. However, she was extremely impressed with the Government's concrete programmes to improve the status of women and encouraged it to continue along that path, because it was only through such programmes and laws that current trends could be changed.

35. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS expressed concern about the lack of data on violence against women. The Government of Morocco should consider that issue in detail. The next report should provide more information about the high incidence of violence against women, especially domestic violence, the incidence of rape and incest and what preventive measures the Government intended to take to address that serious problem. Indeed, it was critical that law enforcement agencies and women themselves should be educated on that issue. She wondered how the Government was dealing with the fact that a very low number of women participated in political decision-making.

36. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco), replying to the comments and questions of Committee members, said that his country had made considerable progress during its 35 years of independence. As far as Islam's impact on the life of women was concerned, he noted that religion was a total lifestyle and an integral part of

Morocco's culture and civilization. It was a rampart against fundamentalism and terrorism. A basic concern of his Government was religious fundamentalism, which sought to impose intolerance. While respecting religion, his Government endeavoured to give women the rights and place that they deserved in society. His Government was definitely not trying to avoid its obligations to implement the Convention. As far as publicity for the Convention was concerned, his Government had used the limited resources at its disposal to publicize it throughout the country. He appealed to the Committee for assistance in further disseminating the Convention.

37. With regard to the representation of women in Morocco's diplomatic corps, he acknowledged that there were only two women ambassadors. One of the obstacles to the appointment of more women was that their spouses often refused to travel with them to overseas postings. A change in social and cultural attitudes was therefore needed.

38. Within the limits of its economic resources, Morocco was doing all it could to improve the literacy rate of women, especially in rural areas. Rural water supply systems, for example, were being improved in order to free young girls from the time-consuming chore of fetching water from long distances and thereby to enable them to attend school.

39. On the subject of the lack of hospital care for rural women in childbirth, the tradition of having recourse to local midwives was deeply entrenched, and persistent efforts over a long period of time would be needed in order to change those habits. The Government nevertheless provided training for some 200 midwives each year to assist with deliveries in rural areas. Mobile medical units were also employed to transport pregnant women to urban hospitals for delivery.

40. His delegation undertook to transmit to the competent authorities those questions to which it had been unable to respond. Morocco had made significant progress in promoting the rights of women in several areas, although, given the formidable obstacles that existed, much remained to be done. He hoped that the Committee would provide encouragement to the Government to continue its efforts in those areas covered by the Convention.

41. Ms. TALLAWY welcomed the recognition by the Moroccan delegation that the religion of Islam guaranteed the rights of women. She wondered, however, whether the Government was doing enough to clarify those rights for the population at large, and especially for the younger generations. It was important to counteract the contrary message which Islamic fundamentalists sought to disseminate through books, tapes and other media. In view of his special status in the Muslim world, King Hassan II might be prevailed upon to sponsor a compilation of the rights of women under the Shariah in order to save upcoming generations from misguided interpretations.

42. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) observed that King Hassan II, each year during the month of Ramadan, organized a conference to which theologians from both the Western and Muslim worlds were invited. At that conference, participants sought to clarify the correct interpretation of the teachings of Islam, including its teachings concerning the rights of women.

43. Ms. Yung-Chung KIM noted that 10,000 women, representing 40 per cent of the student population, had graduated from Moroccan universities and other institutions of higher learning in the 1993-1994 academic year. She wondered whether those graduates were making any efforts to stay in touch with rural women in Morocco and to develop a strong feminist movement, similar to the one which had had such noted impact on changes in South Korean society. She would also welcome additional information on the role of non-governmental organizations in that area.

44. Ms. CORTI observed that legislative elections were due to be held in 1997 in Morocco and expressed the hope that steps would be taken to ensure that women candidates not only ran for office but were also given the kind of support that would increase their chances of being elected, in order to improve the current low level of representation of women in Parliament.

45. Ms. ACAR said that, while it might be natural for a delegation to speak from the national or religious perspective of the State which it represented, the Committee could approach the reports under consideration only from the perspective of whether or not the universal rights of women were being protected. Even though, at their origin, the teachings of Islam were beneficial to women, the cultural realities of that period had changed immeasurably, and what might have been regarded as progressive then were no longer progressive today. Even though, if correctly interpreted, Islamic law did not violate the universal rights of women, as a State party to the Convention and in the spirit of that instrument, Morocco must approach the Convention from the perspective of protecting the universal rights of women.

46. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) said that the statistics concerning women university graduates in Morocco cited by Ms. Yung-Chung Kim were accurate. Additional published material on the subject was available in the conference room for interested experts. Concerning the role of non-governmental organizations, there were over 50 such organizations currently operating in Morocco. They played an active role in international conferences and received assistance from the Government. On the subject of the participation of women in the forthcoming legislative elections, King Hassan II had already appealed to all Moroccans, especially young people and women, to register to vote and had stressed the important role of women in that process.

47. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee's main area of concern was with the Moroccan reservations to articles 2 and 6 of the Convention. Indeed, those reservations precluded the effective realization of the Convention's objectives. Pressure must therefore be brought on the Government to remove them. She noted that other countries in which Islam was also the major religion, such as Turkey and Tunisia, had devised strategies to implement the provisions of the Convention. Programmes must be put in place to effectively combat religious fundamentalism of any kind and to put an end to the systematic discrimination from which women as a group suffered.

48. Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) said that the reservations which Morocco had entered to certain articles of the Convention were not the result of caprice but of a national consensus on the matter. It was not possible to go against that consensus or to change the religion of the State simply to please the Committee.

He did not think it advisable, moreover, to attempt to pressure the Moroccan Government in any way. Better results might be gained through persuasion. He hoped that the Committee would understand the positions which he had so amply outlined.

49. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of the initial report of Morocco.

50. Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) withdrew.

Report of the pre-session working group (CEDAW/C/1997/CRP.1 and Add.1-5)

51. Ms. CORTI, speaking as Chairperson of the pre-session working group, said that, at its sixteenth session, the working group had prepared a list of issues and questions to be submitted to the Governments of Canada, Denmark, the Philippines, Turkey and Venezuela. In considering the reports of those countries, the working group had consulted the general guidelines on the form and content of periodic reports and the Committee's general recommendations. Each member of the working group had been supported by a member of the Secretariat. The working group had received written questions from all members of the Committee with regard to the reports of Canada, Denmark and Venezuela. It had attempted to compensate through constructive dialogue for the fact that it had not received written questions concerning the fourth periodic report of the Philippines and the third periodic report of Turkey.

52. Some of the reporting countries had followed the Committee's guidelines, which had greatly facilitated the work of the pre-session working group. Where countries had not followed the guidelines, the working group had had to waste time organizing information article by article and had had difficulty in gaining an overview. The working group would support a recommendation of the Committee, at the time reports were requested, that States parties should follow the guidelines.

53. Some progress had been made in the implementation of the Convention, but much remained to be done, particularly in the areas of concern outlined at the Fourth World Conference on Women. A great deal depended on the political will of States parties. She noted the rise in fundamentalism and general violence, and their impact on women in particular. Very little progress had been made on eliminating the stereotyped conception of women's role. Referring to a recommendation of the Fourth World Conference on Women and article 7 of the Convention, she also deplored continued discrimination against women in public life.

54. In a discussion with Ms. King, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the pre-session working group had expressed its disappointment that it had not had the input of all Committee members in preparing the questions and issues submitted to Governments, and in formulating concluding comments. It had also commented on the waste of time in arranging information article by article when countries had not followed the Committee's guidelines. Perhaps the Secretariat could help in that regard.

55. The working group must decide whether it wished to devote its session to meeting with non-governmental organizations, discussing certain topics in depth or preparing a general overview of the situation of women in the world.

56. Ms. SCHOPP-SCHILLING said that, in her experience, it had always been the case that questions were submitted to the pre-session working group by a few experts only. Now that the working group met twice a year, it should rethink its work methods; reports for consideration by the Committee should be identified two sessions ahead. A post-session working group, similar to those of other human rights treaty bodies, could prepare questions for future sessions in order to give representatives of countries more time to reflect. The working group should also decide whether to focus, in future, on a limited number of issues or countries as a follow-up to its concluding comments on periodic reports.

57. Ms. SHALEV agreed that a post-session working group would give States more time to respond to the Committee's questions and non-governmental organizations more time to prepare their reports. It would also enable States parties to submit their answers in writing so that the Committee could engage in a true dialogue with them during the actual sessions.

58. She inquired about the difference in procedure between initial and periodic reports. In particular, she wondered why questions were not prepared for initial reports. She welcomed the suggestion that the working group should meet with non-governmental organizations or prepare analyses of reports. At the same time, she recalled from her own experience as a member of the working group that the most difficult task had been to compare initial and periodic reports. Periodic reports should not be as comprehensive as initial reports, but rather should merely provide the Committee with an update.

59. Ms. GONZÁLEZ MARTÍNEZ agreed that questions on initial reports should also be sent to States parties in advance. A post-session working group would not be as useful as the pre-session working group, because it was vital to have the input of all Committee members for the consideration of reports. She did agree, however, that the Committee could review its methods of work and perhaps introduce some changes in 1998. It could also consider the possibility of determining the number of reports to be reviewed two sessions ahead of time; for example, in January, the pre-session working group would review the reports to be considered in July. Other human rights treaty bodies, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee, gave States parties much more time - at least three months - to prepare and submit replies to questions.

60. Committee members who were not members of the pre-session working group should submit their questions well in advance, preferably by article or chapter. Information provided by non-governmental organizations, while secondary to the reports of States parties, could also be useful if it was sent to the Committee in sufficient time.

61. Ms. CORTI, replying to Ms. Shalev's questions, recalled that, following a similar discussion, the Committee had taken a unanimous decision not to prepare questions concerning initial reports and to attempt, instead, to establish a

direct and constructive dialogue with the States parties. She also wished to assure the Committee that the pre-session working group had taken into account the previous reports of States parties whose periodic reports were being considered. She agreed with Ms. Schöpp-Schilling that the Committee should review concluding comments in order to facilitate its work and sharpen its analyses of reports.

62. The CHAIRPERSON added that the Secretariat also provided the Committee with an analysis of the content of the initial and other previous reports.

63. Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL stressed the importance of the concluding comments in analysing reports from States parties. The Committee should do its utmost to ensure that the concluding comments were comprehensive, and that they were presented in the order of the articles of the Convention. Referring to Ms. Shalev's observation, she said that it was indeed necessary to review all articles of the Convention in the periodic reports in order to ensure that States parties had not regressed in any way. It would probably complicate the Committee's work to begin submitting questions for initial reports, particularly since the Committee expected to have fewer initial reports to review. She had long been a proponent of specializing - perhaps by article, by country or by initial versus periodic reports - in order to accomplish more work with greater effectiveness.

64. Ms. TALLAWY said that non-governmental organizations were a vital source of information on the situation at the grass-roots level and could propose practical solutions to representatives of States parties. Referring to the comments by the representative of Morocco concerning his country's reservation to article 2 of the Convention, she maintained that international law must be respected as well. Perhaps the Committee could append introductions culled from previous reports of States parties to the questions it submitted. The introductory statements would summarize major developments, including reservations. It was to be hoped that States parties would publish the Committee's concluding remarks on the previous report, together with its introductions and questions to the report currently under review, in order to increase awareness at the national level.

65. She, too, had urged the Committee to consider having its members specialize in order to expedite its work. Her proposal had been rejected on the grounds that experts should also have an opportunity to raise questions concerning areas in which they were not specializing. In fact, though, one did not preclude the other. Committee members could specialize and still be free to pose questions in other areas.

66. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed Ms. Tallawy's comment concerning the Moroccan reservation, noting that most Governments needed to be pressured in some form in order to comply with the Convention.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.